



ONLY ON 3: Columbus County bondsman says unsecured bonds are out of control

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COLUMBUS COUNTY, NC (WWAY) -- A bond is supposed to keep criminal suspects behind bars. But, in the last four months, hundreds of people in Columbus County, including some with violent charges, have been issued unsecured bonds.

A two-inch stack of unsecured bonds includes crimes like drug trafficking, sexual battery and assault on a child under 12. When placed under an unsecured bond the defendant is trusted to appear in court on the assigned date and to stay away from their alleged victims.

Judge Douglas Sesser and Judge Jerry Jolly drew up the new bail policy for Columbus and Bladen counties in May. Mark Cartret, who owns a bail bonds office in Columbus County, says he hasn't seen a policy as liberal as this in any other district. He says before the new policy was implemented, unsecured bonds accounted for about 25 to 30 percent of bonds issued. In the past few months, Cartret says the amount of unsecured bonds has exploded.

"I have approximately 1,000 unsecured bonds that I'm looking at, which correlates to approximately 97.2 percent of bonds that are issued by magistrates in Columbus County," said Cartret.

Under the new policy, to issue a secured bond, magistrates must fill out a three-page questionnaire on each defendant, making it a more cumbersome process. Cartret says the policy makes it much easier for magistrates to issue unsecured bonds.

"So to tell a magistrate, who is often working long shifts, that they've got to do three pages of additional paperwork to issue secure bonds is almost a burden on them," said Cartret.

We did speak with Judge Sasser who says he modeled the policy after the North Carolina general statute. He says he trusts the magistrates to make the right decision in determining what kind of bond to issue.